Report to CCA on the work of the Co-operative College in Australia – past and future

Background:

By early 2003 CFV had been acutely aware of the urgent need in Australia for the provision of co-operative education and training to co-operatives in this country for some time. It had held protracted discussions with a range of education institutions, none of which had reached a satisfactory stage. The major problem being that they were all totally ignorant when it came to knowledge of and about co-operatives. Another problem was their concern as to how small the market for co-operative education might be. In other words they were reluctant to commit resources to develop programs that might have limited take-up. In 2003 CFV Deputy-chairman Graeme Charles (GC) and former EO of the Federation, holidayed in England. He took time from his holiday to meet with Mervyn Wilson (MW), CEO of the Co-operative College located in Manchester

GC took the opportunity whilst in England to make contact with the UK Co-operative College. He had previously visited their website and was aware of the range of programs they were offering and delivering in England and various other countries. After an initial meeting with Mervyn Wilson in London, GC spent several days at the College in Manchester meeting with various staff members and basically familiarising himself with the College programs and operations. The discussion between CFV and the College focussed very much on the question of the suitability of the College's programs for delivery in Australia and continued after GC's return to Australia. At that time CFV made some attempt to interest other Federations in this education initiative without any real success, although subsequently Co-operativesWA invited MW to address their 2005 Annual Conference, which enabled him to visit Australia and make his own assessment of the situation here.

In 2005 GC returned to England and again met with Mervyn Wilson in Manchester. On this occasion Mervyn has just returned from Australia where he addressed the annual conference of Co-operativesWA and met with various co-operative leaders in WA and Victoria. He reported to CFV that in his opinion the Australian co- operative sector was suffering a crisis of confidence and as a result any attempt to introduce co-operative education programs here would have to start at the start. He suggested that the College's Co-operative Identity Program, with some adaptation for the Australian co-operative environment, would be an ideal program to start with. After GC's return to Australia the CFV attempted to interest other Federations in joining in this initiative. Again the attempts bore no fruit.

CFV persisted and promoted the Co-operative Identity Program for Directors and Senior Managers to several of our larger co-operatives. In August 2006 Chris Cooper, Deputy Principal and Director of Learning for the College, came to Australia and conducted three Identity programs. One in Perth for the Capricorn Society and the other two in Melbourne, one for Murray Goulburn Co-op Company and the second an open event

attended by representatives from about a dozen Victorian and NSW co-operatives. These programs were successful, particularly so in the case of Capricorn who have held two further Identity programs for their staff, conducted in both cases by Chris Cooper, the latest of these in November 2007. This was added to by a request for training from a co-operative in NSW and a successful visit to New Zealand. Earlier in 2007 CFNSW had joined the initiative when Chris conducted an open Identity workshop for them in Coffs Harbour.

Comment:

The initial understanding reached between Mervyn Wilson and GC was that the College would seek to develop CFV capacity to deliver co-operative education and through that an income stream which would strengthen its financial position. CFV has been suffering a significant decline in revenue from membership subscriptions for some years. Membership subscriptions, or rather the lack of them, have in fact descended to a critically low level. In November GC joined the train the trainer Co-op Identity workshop conducted by Chris Cooper for Capricorn Society and as a result is now accredited by the College to deliver Co-operative Identity programs in Victoria. As a matter of interest, GC has qualifications in accounting and secondary teaching, and has been closely associated with the co-operative sector in Victoria as a co-operative member and director for the past 15 years. He was the last EO employed by CFV and has served as a director of that organization for the last 7 years.

2008 and beyond:

Agreement:

In January 2008 CFV and the College entered into a Memorandum of Understanding. The objectives of which are to aid in the development of a closer relationship between CFV and the Co-operative College to enable CFV to deliver a range of Co-operative Identity workshops. Both parties had been in discussion leading up to the finalisation of the MOU during most of 2007. At this stage GC is the sole person (resident in Australia) accredited by the College to deliver its workshops here. The MOU provides for a two-way income sharing arrangement between CFV and the College for programs delivered in Australia.

The College is hopeful of continuing to work in Australia in partnership with the various State Federations. I understand that Chris is attempting to develop partnerships with States other than Victoria, however I am not aware of the current status of these, although Chris has circulated a draft brochure that indicates the College is working in partnership with the Victorian, NSW and WA Federations. Co-operatives are invited to contact either Chris Cooper or GC if they are interested in any of the College programs. As to exactly what is meant by the term partnership, I would have thought this a question each Federation will thrash out as part of its discussion with Chris Cooper.

The College in Australia:

Chris Cooper and other College staff will continue to visit Australia once or twice annually in the foreseeable future to deliver a range of Co-operative Identity and related programs to our co-operatives. On his latest visit here last November, he had preliminary discussions with a number of WA co-operatives. I understand these meetings were arranged through Peter Wells. He also conducted a workshop for a NSW co-operative which had contacted him following attending the Identity program conducted for CFNSW in Coffs Harbour earlier in 2007. The feedback Chris has had from Chairmen, Directors, CEO's and managers is that there is a dearth of effective co-operative training and they want the College to help fill the gap.

Subsequently, requests have been received from co-operatives in WA, NSW and NZ for training in 2008. The format for this is currently under negotiation and Chris is planning to return to Australia some time this year once arrangements with various co-operatives are firmed-up. In the meantime CFV will continue to promote Identity programs to co-operatives in Victoria. It hopes that by using GC to deliver programs it may be able to attract some of its medium-sized co-operatives, who have found the existing cost of the Identity program when delivered by Chris, beyond their capacity to pay. Both the College and CFV recognize that the cost of the Identity program when delivered by Chris, involving return flights from England and a currency conversion rate working against us, does preclude all but our bigger co-operatives from participating.

Roles and relationships:

As mentioned earlier, CFV has entered into a MOU with the College. I am not aware of the current status of any arrangements the College has with other State Federations. In any case these would be a matter for them to negotiate with the College, without need to involve or refer to CFV. There has been a suggestion that any Agreement with the College re the provision of co-operative education programs in Australia should preferably be a matter for the CCA rather than the State Federations. The CCA could discuss this with the College, but would need to be mindful that at least one State already has an agreement with the College. CFV would no doubt be reluctant to forego the arrangement it has reached with the College after so many years of hard work. CFV persisted in working with the College when no one else in Australia was interested. It is gratifying that interest in the College's activities in Australia has now reached the level it has, however any agreement between the CCA and the College would need to ensure that it didn't impact negatively on the existing arrangements between CFV and the College, particularly in terms of potential revenue for CFV. Of course this situation would be different if the CCA or its equivalent became the sole "peak" body for Australian co-operatives, a situation that I personally believe to be desirable, indeed vital.

Prepared by

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